

III. Corridor Assessment

LAND USE AND ZONING

Development of Land Use Pattern

Georgia Avenue's land use pattern was developed primarily during the early part of the Twentieth Century, mainly with residential structures, including row houses, apartment buildings and single-family detached dwellings. Although no parking spaces were required when most of these buildings were constructed, some of the row houses and single-family detached dwellings were improved with detached garages that were accessed from the alleys.

Commercial development included small, one-story commercial structures, and the ground floor of some apartment buildings. Over time, many of the row houses were expanded with storefront additions for retail uses. As many of these commercial structures are on narrow lots, have low ceilings, and lack modern features, they are obsolete in terms of today's retail industry standards.

The lack of parking for businesses and residents is another challenge resulting from the development history of the corridor. Georgia Avenue was primarily developed prior to World War II, when few Americans had automobiles and most met their transportation needs through a combination of walking and using the trolley. Demand for parking was minimal. However, as the use and ownership of automobiles increased significantly during the second half of the last century, the lack of off-street parking became apparent along the corridor, for both business and residents. Most individual businesses were unable to provide sufficient off-street parking due to the small size of the lots. Some property owners did acquire adjacent properties for the provision of off-street parking.

Existing Zoning

The majority of the study area is zoned for mixed-use development, with the predominant land use along Georgia Avenue being commercial. Residential zone districts exist only in the northern portion of the study area. Specifically, properties on the east side of Georgia Avenue from Varum Street to Decatur Street are located within the R-4 Zone District (a moderate density zone permitting primarily row dwellings and those that have been converted for two or more families). Properties on the east side of Georgia Avenue, between Buchanan Street and Decatur Street are located in the R-1-B Zone District (primarily one-family detached dwellings). Properties on the west side of Georgia Avenue, between Allison Street and Buchanan Street (4500 block) are located in the R-4 Zone District. Several apartment buildings do exist in this block, although apartment buildings are not permitted in the R-4 Zone District. Three of these apartment buildings date from the 1920s. This block also includes row houses and detached and semi-detached dwellings.

Two commercial zone districts make up the remainder of the corridor: the C-3-A Zone District (a medium density mixed-use zone providing a broad range of goods and services) on both sides of Georgia Avenue between Park Road and Shepherd Street and the C-2-A Zone District (a low to medium density mixed-use zone providing a limited range of retail goods and services) on the remainder of the corridor. The C-2-A Zone also extends east of Georgia Avenue on both sides of Upshur Street to Eighth Street and west of Georgia Avenue on the north side of Lamont Street to the alley located behind buildings fronting on Sherman Avenue.

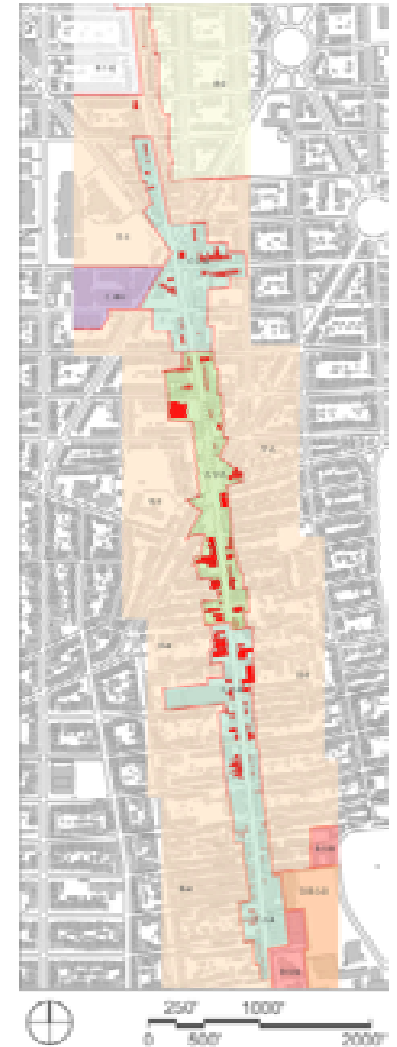


FIG. 17.1 - Existing Zoning Districts

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Current Land Use Pattern

Today the vast majority of the existing zoning (C-2-A and C-3-A) allows mixed-use development—retail, office, and residential uses—the land use pattern that has developed is mainly a continuous stretch of retail uses. These retail uses, however, lack the diversity of retail services that many residents desire, forcing them to go elsewhere to meet their shopping and service needs. There are also many vacant storefronts along the corridor, indicating an excess of retail space. These vacancies are also attributable to today's modern retail options, which now include big box stores, shopping malls, catalog shopping and the Internet, all of which contribute to reducing the demand on an older, local commercial corridor like Georgia Avenue. As indicated above, many of the buildings are not suitable for modern retailing, which further contributes to the high rate of vacancies.

Vacant storefronts are evidence that the market has not been able to fill these units. These vacant, boarded up stores not only discourage existing retailers from investing in their businesses and new retailers from entering the area, they also contribute to the crime and other quality of life issues along the corridor. The reduction of vacant and abandoned spaces, and the addition of more people on the street will increase the sense of safety, as the number of available places to hide is decreased and the number of eyes on the street is increased.

Since the corridor's land use pattern has changed to mostly commercial uses, there is now a lack of residential development, which would provide a strong "shot in the arm" for retailing. Encouraging housing, as well as office development, would support retail by creating more customers and supporting longer hours. Additionally, residential units above retail keep the street active around the clock, improve security through the provision of additional "eyes on the street" and provide convenience for residents and sales volume for retailers.